

Testimony of Katherine Almquist USAID Assistant Administrator for Africa

The Crisis in Zimbabwe & Prospects for Resolution

Subcommittee on African Affairs
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
July 15, 2008

Thank you for inviting me to speak about USAID's support for US foreign policy goals in Zimbabwe. We appreciate the strong bipartisan support in Congress for this deeply troubled country.

Since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, USAID has worked with the people of Zimbabwe to overcome many obstacles on the path to progress. Our commitment to this goal remains strong. Today, our programs provide critical support for the people of Zimbabwe's desire for peaceful democratic change, while sustaining crucial legal, medical, health, food and other humanitarian assistance to the millions of innocent victims of the regime's violence and mismanagement. In the midst of the current, most severe crisis facing the people and friends of Zimbabwe, we remain optimistic about the country's long-term potential and its prospects for positive change. When genuine reform does occur, our mission and partners stand ready to work with this Committee to assist the new government and people in ensuring the country's successful transformation to its former status as a constructive and prosperous member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Africa and the greater international community.

Current Situation

Many difficult challenges confront Zimbabwe. The country faces what experts call the worst harvest in decades due primarily to government mismanagement. As a result, the survival of as many as four million people - more than a third of Zimbabwe's population - will depend on imported food aid this year. At present, the following year looks equally bleak as agricultural inputs are scarce and farmers have little incentive to cultivate their land.

State-sponsored violence and torture continue as ruling party militants try to eliminate the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and anyone else not bowing to the autocratic demands of the Mugabe regime. According to human rights monitors, more than 100 MDC activists have been killed and thousands more have been seriously injured since the March 29 elections. Emergency care for many of these victims of beatings and torture is provided by brave doctors and nurses who are often beaten themselves for performing this critical medical work.

The violence has forced tens of thousands of Zimbabweans to flee their homes and villages. Most of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) have found temporary shelter with relatives and friends in towns and cities. Some IDPs have sought refuge in so-called "safe areas," supposedly protected by negotiated security arrangements with government and United Nations (U.N.) agencies. However, state-sponsored militias are now even attacking these "safe havens," sending victims running for their lives once again. With no one to turn to and no place to go, many Zimbabweans are opting to join the millions of their countrymen who have fled to an uncertain fate in neighboring lands.

Compounding the humanitarian crisis, the Government of Zimbabwe suspended the operations of humanitarian NGOs in early June. Rigidly enforced by local government authorities, military and militias, this suspension means that NGO staff cannot even leave offices to assess the conditions and needs in most parts of the country. Actual aid provision is nearly impossible. Even churches and faith-based organizations are afraid to provide aid and sanctuary to IDPs because of intimidation and fear of violent reprisals.

In short, Mugabe's regime has unleashed organized brutality on an enormous scale, and largely prevented humanitarian aid from reaching the bloodied, hungry, terrorized, and displaced people of the country.

USAID Program Responses

USAID has aggressively responded to the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe through both humanitarian assistance as well as our on-going democracy and governance initiatives.

Humanitarian Assistance

USAID's Food for Peace program provided 175, 000 metric tons of food worth \$171 million to millions of the country's most vulnerable people in the past year. About half of this food was distributed through a consortium of NGOs known as C-SAFE, consisting of World Vision, CARE, and Catholic Relief Services. The other half was distributed by the U.N. World Food Program. In total, the U.S. Government contributed 72 percent of all food assistance given to Zimbabwe last year. Over half of all the food distributed by the U.N. World Food Program was given by USAID.

About \$115 million is already in the food assistance pipeline for this next hungry season. More is on the way, but we need GOZ assurances that our partners will have access to freely distribute this food to the most vulnerable communities. Since the beginning of the country's deterioration in 2000, the U.S. has provided well over 1 million metric tons of food assistance to this troubled country.

USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance has also provided \$5.9 million in FY 08 through several partner organizations including Mercy Corps, World Vision, OXFAM, FAO, OCHA, and IOM for non-food relief items such as blankets, feeding utensils, and personal hygiene supplies, water and sanitation improvements, emergency medical supplies, logistics support, and protection and coordination mechanisms. We are prepared to rapidly respond with more assistance if the situation deteriorates further.

As part of its on-going humanitarian effort, USAID also implements a \$26.9 million, HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment program to help Zimbabwe fight one of the most severe HIV and AIDS epidemics in the world. Even as the general health of the population declines progress is being made, as HIV prevalence has declined from 24 percent in 2001 to 15.6 percent in 2007. Implemented through a variety of partner organizations, USAID's program elements include:

- Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission.
- Behavior Change Promotion.
- Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) Services.
- Commodity Logistics and Drug Procurement.
- Testing and Counseling.
- Palliative Care.
- Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children.

USAID efforts confront not only a huge disease burden, but also a badly deteriorated public health system. Thus, our programs are designed with intentional spill-over effects to shore up overall systems within the public health sector, while we address specific HIV/AIDS-related needs.

Our NGO partners are the real heroes in the humanitarian sphere, as they struggle to maintain assistance in spite of severe constraints. We want to express our deep appreciation and admiration for their excellent, unstinting efforts in meeting the critical needs of Zimbabweans, often at great risk of personal peril.

The restrictions on aid agency operations are prohibiting us from responding in typical ways. To create the "humanitarian space" necessary for aid operations, we are working with other donors to encourage the U.N. to strengthen its efforts to press the Government of Zimbabwe to put a stop to the violence and open up humanitarian access. Without permission to access displaced and vulnerable populations, the humanitarian organizations are handicapped. We hope these U.N. interventions - on behalf of the donor and humanitarian community - will soon bear fruit.

Democracy and Governance Initiatives

The U.S. Government seeks the restoration of truly representative democracy and responsible governance for Zimbabwe. To that end, USAID programs have focused on restoring the rule of law, protecting human rights, fostering good governance, enhancing citizen participation and consensus-building, expanding media communication, strengthening civil society and democratic institutions, promoting transparent elections and supporting citizen oversight of the electoral process.

USAID partners and programs provide technical assistance and other support to boost the capacity of non-governmental actors and citizens to more actively participate in the debate on the future directions of the country.

Within an extremely restrictive environment, these civil society actors are working to shape and strengthen democratic institutions in an effort to make them more responsive and accountable to Zimbabwean society.

Although sometimes overshadowed by the country's continuing turmoil, USAID programs have made significant gains with civil society and the forces of democracy in Zimbabwe. Pro-democracy groups mobilized millions of Zimbabweans to "get out the vote", leading to an historic victory for MDC candidates in the March 2008 elections and an MDC majority leadership in Parliament. Zimbabweans were inspired and empowered by the electoral defeat of Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF. The ruling party was not able to rig the elections outright, as usual, in part due to a USAID-funded "parallel vote tabulation" (PVT) that released results of sample-based counting in a rapid and transparent manner. Despite the difficult country conditions, this initiative was one of the most successful such undertakings of this PVT technology practiced anywhere to date.

Legal and medical support to victims of state oppression, made possible largely through USAID assistance, has encouraged activists to continue pressing for democratic change. In addition, USAID supports programs that document human rights abuses, torture, and other crimes for future accountability and reconciliation.

Initiatives to inform and mobilize regional and international media and civil society groups have resulted in increasing condemnation and isolation of the discredited Mugabe regime. This pressure has garnered increased room for engagement with SADC and the African Union, and increased prospects for a negotiated solution to the crisis. These gains need to be protected and advanced with continued USG support.

USAID's Contingency Planning

USAID stands ready with other donors to re-engage in substantial development assistance in Zimbabwe once conditions permit. Such assistance would be premised on a new government which respects and shows progress on the following common donor principles:

- Full and equal access to humanitarian assistance
- " Commitment to macroeconomic stabilization in accordance with guidance from relevant international agencies.
- Restoration of the Rule of Law, including enforcement of contracts, an independent judiciary, and respect for property rights.
- Commitment to the democratic process and respect for internationally accepted human rights standards, including a commitment to freedom of expression, freedom of print and broadcast media, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association.
- A commitment to timely elections held in accordance with international standards, and in the presence of international election observers

With Congress' support, we would seek to invest significantly in Zimbabwe upon the return of democracy, so that it can begin its process of stabilization and recovery. Our staff and partners are ready to engage with a new, reform-minded government and other donors to build a comprehensive reconstruction program. A Multi-Donor Trust Fund, administered by the World Bank, is already completing analyses on various social and economic sectors to give us a collective, coordinated roadmap for reconstruction to discuss with a new democratic government.

As an integral part of a reconstruction program, our humanitarian assistance will help provide a "social safety net" to help ease the pain of market-based stabilization measures and support livelihoods as the economy recovers. We anticipate renewed support to the agricultural sector and a strong emphasis on the renewal of the once-thriving private sector. We are ready to work closely with the International Financial Institutions in support of timely and effective macroeconomic stabilization and reform. Based upon our current successful programs, we will expand our HIV/AIDS program commensurate with the demands of the 16 percent prevalence rate, and broaden our assistance to bolster the failing health system, including an emphasis on child and maternal health, TB and malaria.

USAID has a long and successful history of working with Zimbabwe's civil society, democratic political parties, the Parliament and local government. We are looking immediately at ways to exploit the democratic spaces that have opened up after the March 29 elections. We have a parliament that reflects the will of the people and, together with our partners, we are working to strengthen its capacity in dealing with the political and social challenges the country faces. The newly elected urban city councils present another excellent opportunity for our partners to provide people-centered programs focused on effective service delivery through social mobilization. Our assistance to a free media and access to reliable information continues in partnership with the Voice of America and local media-focused NGOs. With a new government in place, we will expand current programs to include assistance for constitutional reform, and reform of the judiciary and the security sector.

However, if the violence does not stop, if aid organizations are not allowed to resume life-saving assistance, if

widespread fighting escalates and forces mass population displacement, then the international community will be faced with a potential humanitarian disaster on a much larger scale than the serious situation which we already face.

With our partners and donors, USAID is simultaneously working to prevent this worst case scenario, while preparing to respond to it. We don't know which turn Zimbabwe will take in its tumultuous journey out of tyranny, but USAID stands ready to support Zimbabweans in realizing their rightful aspirations for liberation from the current brutal and despotic regime and in the transition to a new, more just and prosperous society.